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SUBJECT: A/S FELTMAN AND FM ZEBARI LAUNCH DIPLOMATIC JCC-  
PART I: REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gary A. Grappo for reason  
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On January 24, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, A/DCM, and a delegation of experts on Chapter VII issues met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari and an interministerial committee of Iraqi experts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baghdad. The discussion marked the inaugural meeting of the Diplomatic and Political Joint Coordination Committee (JCC), and focused on regional relations and the way forward on a host of Chapter VII issues, as well as plans for future bilateral engagement and cooperation. This cable focuses on the first portion of the meeting, during which FM Zebari offered an overview of Iraq's relations with neighboring countries and solicited A/S Feltman's "panoramic views" of U.S. relations with Iraq's neighbors. A second cable will focus on the group's discussion of Chapter VII issues during the latter half of the JCC. End summary.

12. (C) NEA A/S Jeffrey Feltman co-chaired the first meeting of the Diplomatic and Political Joint Coordination Committee with FM Hoshyar Zebari at the MFA on January 24. The Iraqi interministerial committee at the meeting included Zebari's COS Sroud Najib, DFM Labeed Abbawi, Senior Policy Advisor Fareed Yasseen, Ambassador Mohammed al-Hamameidi, PM legal advisor Fadel Jawad Kadhum, and PM Advisor Sadiq Rikabi, as well as other experts. The U.S. side included A/DCM, Deputy Pol/C, NEA Senior Advisor Elissa Slotkin, USUN Deputy Political Counselor Ellen Germain, NSC Advisor Peter Vrooman, Attorney Advisor Jeremy Sharpe, IO officer Bill Haldeman, and Iraq desk officer Wa'el Alzayat. FM Zebari welcomed A/S Feltman and his delegation to Iraq and stated that the messages conveyed by Vice President Biden during his visit the previous weekend "reinforced the depth of the U.S.-Iraq relationship". He further expressed that the JCC marked an important development in bilateral relations, as it enables the Government of Iraq (GOI) to fulfill the key goals of supporting Iraq's position in international organizations, developing positive relationships with neighboring countries, and regaining Iraq's position in the international community by taking the necessary steps to exit Chapter VII. A/S Feltman echoed the FM's sentiments, characterizing the JCC as a "foundation" of the U.S.-Iraq relationship and an important vehicle for furthering bilateral goals. End summary.

IRAQ-IRAN RELATIONS:"A TOUGH NEIGHBORHOOD"

13. (C) FM Zebari offered an overview of Iraq's relations with neighboring countries and solicited A/S Feltman's insights into U.S. relations with Iraq's neighbors, joking that Iraqis "live in a tough neighborhood". He began with Iraq-Iran relations, stating that despite a long history of animosity between the two nations, Iran remains Iraq's biggest neighbor, and the first to support regime change and democratic transformation. The FM elaborated that a key

concern for Iran has been the presence of forces and hostile elements in Iraq, and that the recent Fakka oil well issue was a "great embarrassment" that "poisoned" relations. When asked by A/S Feltman about the motivations behind the Fakka oil incident, Zebari called the incident "stupid", stating that Iran's leadership "is not unified", but that he is hopeful such dissension will be resolved soon. Despite current Iran-Iraq tensions, he added, dialogue between the two nations on political issues continues, trade relations exceed USD 5 billion, and Iraq continues to receive lots of distinguished visitors from Iran. He concluded that Iran is "in competition" with other regional powers to determine the outcome of Iraq's upcoming elections, and solicited A/S Feltman's thoughts on U.S. relations with Iran. A/S Feltman responded that while the USG has made it clear it is willing to move its relationship with Iran in a positive direction, the Government of Iran has not been responsive, particularly in discussions about its nuclear file, in essence failing to confirm that the USG's offers of engagement are working. FM Zebari offered that the GOI might be in a position to help the United States, since Iraq has better relations with Iran than any other nation in the region and has been "very direct in its messaging to the Government of Iran, even on the nuclear file."

#### RELATIONS WITH TURKEY, SAUDI ARABIA, AND OTHERS

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14. (C) Turning next to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and Yemen, FM Zebari described Iraq-Turkey relations as "modest", highlighting as areas of concern the PKK presence in northern Iraq and Turkish efforts to "step in at every

level" to influence Iraq's elections. Zebari added that Iraq is "making progress" in its relations with Jordan and has become Jordan's largest trade partner, but that Ba'athist activities in Jordan continue to cause problems for Iraq. On Saudi Arabia, Zebari stated that relations are bad, adding that "Saudi Arabia doesn't want to see the rise of Shi'a power in Iraq" in spite of the eagerness of some Saudi businessmen to develop trade relations with Iraq. A/S Feltman shared that the USG believes Saudis are far behind in warming relations with Iraq, but that there may be an opportunity to improve relations after elections. A/S Feltman noted that the U.S. has maintained a strong focus on Yemen for some time and continues to take a two-pronged approach that involves offering short-term assistance to the Government of Yemen (ROYG) to fight the al-Qa'ida threat while increasing long-term assistance to help the ROYG provide crucial services to the Yemeni people. FM Zebari responded that the GOI sees "all the ingredients of Afghanistan in Yemen."

#### KUWAIT

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15. (C) The FM shared that the GOI and the Government of Kuwait (GOK) are communicating, but outstanding Chapter VII resolutions restrict the bilateral dialogue. Zebari commented that it will be "very difficult" to resolve issues with Kuwait, and no progress is expected before the elections. A/S Feltman commended the MFA's efforts to work with the Kuwaitis, at the same time urging the GOI to send an Iraqi ambassador to Kuwait to further improve relations. FM Zebari countered that the Parliament kept the list of Iraqi ambassadors for one year without announcing their countries of assignment, but the MFA is in the process of identifying possible candidates for Kuwait and sorting out the larger group, adding skeptically that an announcement might happen before elections.

#### LIBYA

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16. (C) When asked by A/S Feltman about Iraq's current relationship with Libya, FM Zebari related that Libya has an

"ideological position", focused on an outdated view of Iraq as "occupied", and does not support a democratic Iraq. The FM expressed disappointment that Libya has not as yet leveraged the large and highly skilled Iraqi community in Tripoli to better its relations with Iraq, but offered that he is optimistic that relations will improve through discussions at upcoming events like the Arab Summit.

SYRIA

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17. (C) FM Zebari and A/S Feltman next discussed Syria, the former stating that Syria supports the violent opposition in Iraq while simultaneously endorsing every Iraq-related Security Council resolution to show support on an international level. He intimated to A/S Feltman that as Syria's actions "grow bolder and bolder", Iraq cannot control Syria without help from the United States, stressing that the GOI strongly believes Ba'athist elements with links to Syria are responsible for the August 19 bombing in Baghdad and subsequent attacks. When asked by FM Zebari to offer his views on U.S.-Syrian relations, A/S Feltman stated that the USG's agenda with the SARG includes relations with Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, human rights, and the Middle East Peace Process. A/S Feltman added that while the USG "has no doubt that Syrian territory is being exploited to carry out attacks," the GOI's response to the August 19 bombing placed the USG in an "awkward" position since the specific accusations leveled against Syria by Iraq were not the same. Accusations leveled against Syria by Iraq were not the same conclusions reached by the USG. FM Zebari solicited thoughts from A/S Feltman's delegation on how to seek follow-up on UN Assistant Secretary Oscar Fernandez-Taranco's November visit to Baghdad to view evidence related to the August 19 bombing.

Zebari noted that the visit was helpful, but that if it continues to be a stand alone gesture, it will be a "joke". USUN Deputy Pol Counselor Germain told the FM that Fernandez-Taranco is compiling a report and that there exists a common understanding that his visit was "the start of a process", but that the UN SYG never defined a timeline for the process. Germain added that the way forward is to approach the UN to determine next steps and how to address the root causes of the August 19 bombing.

18. (U) NEA Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman reviewed this cable.

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